

Charting A New Course for Georgia's Water Security: Overview

In July of 2009—after two decades of deadlock among Georgia, Florida, and Alabama over the operation of Buford Dam and other water allocation issues—a federal judge ruled against Georgia, rejecting metro Atlanta's claim to Lake Lanier for water supply. The judge gave Georgia three years, until July 2012, to reach a water sharing agreement with the other states.

One year has passed since the judge's ruling, and by most accounts, negotiations in the tri-state water war are failing. Unless we change course soon, we will be left high and dry in 2012. This issue is one of the most pressing challenges facing our next governor, and voters must know where our candidates stand. With so much at stake, we cannot afford to fail.

Based on our many years of protecting the Chattahoochee, Coosa and Flint Rivers, accounting for the needs of people and wildlife throughout these river basins, Coosa River Basin Initiative, Flint Riverkeeper, and Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper believe that **we can reach a mutually beneficial water-sharing agreement if our next leaders, most notably the new governor, practice these three R's: RESPECT, REVEAL and REDUCE.**

OLD COURSE = FAILURE	NEW COURSE = SUCCESS
Conflict – Our current leaders have pitted the needs of metro Atlanta against the needs of everyone downstream –in Georgia and in other states--fostering conflict instead of cooperation.	Respect – Our next governor and other leaders must demonstrate respect for all downstream communities, including their right to enough clean water, a sustainable environment, and future prosperity.
Conceal - Our current leaders insist that secrecy is necessary to achieve a negotiated water sharing agreement, but this tactic has failed to produce any progress for two decades. Secrecy hinders political accountability and inhibits public confidence in a solution.	Reveal – Our next governor and his or her administration must reject secrecy and engage Georgia's stakeholders openly and fully in the negotiation process, including the ACF Stakeholders Group and the Tri-State Conservation Coalition.
Capture – Our current leaders are wasting time and money focusing on expensive and highly-engineered storage and piping projects that cannot guarantee water supply in time to help us meet the 2012 deadline. We do not have the money to pay for these schemes.	Reduce - Our next governor and all of our leaders must commit to reducing metro Atlanta's water demand through aggressive conservation and efficiency measures, <i>beyond</i> the modest steps taken by the 2010 legislature.

Refer to the enclosed three-point plan for specific recommendations.

We urge all gubernatorial candidates to endorse this change of course!

Governor Perdue's own Water Contingency Planning Task Force concluded in December 2009 that the *only* way to meet metro Atlanta's water demand by the 2012 deadline is through conservation and negotiating for reallocation of some portion of Lake Lanier for metro Atlanta water supply.

By committing to the above steps, Georgia will be in a position to negotiate effectively with our downstream neighbors and achieve a water sharing agreement by the July 2012 deadline to meet water needs not secured through conservation.

Charting a New Course for Georgia's Water Security – A Three-Point Plan

1. RESPECT the needs of downstream users.

We must be fair to communities in Georgia and in other states and demonstrate respect for their need for a fair share of water (see *"Riverkeepers on their Rivers"*). Our next governor must:

- Respect the rights of downstream users to their water supply by **controlling interbasin transfers** through state legislation passed during the 2011 session. (See *"Interbasin Transfers"* for details.)
- Respect the need to **keep enough water in our rivers and streams for a sustainable environment** and the economic prosperity it assures by adopting an instream flow protection regulation.
- **Respect river basin boundaries** by reorganizing the Water Council regional planning boundaries by river basin; include the Metro District in the Basin Councils, and fund these Councils to do their job.

2. REVEAL the facts about tri-state negotiations from this point forward and share data.

Our leaders have concealed the water sharing negotiations with Alabama and Florida for two decades. After the July 2010 ruling, the three states secured court approval to continue negotiating in secret, effectively excluding the stakeholders from important decisions that will affect the public. There has also been a failure to share and agree on important data that can guide us to solutions. The lack of transparency and sunshine on these negotiations stifles the public's ability to demand political accountability. Our next governor must:

- **Reject secrecy and "confidentiality" agreements.**
- **Insist on open exchange of facts and data** on water use throughout the basin, and finally collect and publish useful data that is lacking.
- **Involve** the ACF Stakeholders Group, Tri-state Conservation Coalition, and **all stakeholders** whose participation and expertise will help move the negotiations forward.

3. REDUCE our water use throughout the basin, especially in metro Atlanta.

By reducing demand, water efficiency provides a timely and cost-effective alternative to building expensive new water supply sources. UCR and American Rivers have analyzed the expected water savings from the measures set forth in Georgia Water Stewardship Act of 2010 and concluded that it will save approximately 23.4 million gallons a day (mgd), which represents about 3.5% of the water demand in metro Atlanta during the 2000s, and 2.1% of the demand anticipated in 2035. Our analysis shows that with additional conservation measures we can meet approximately 90% of that demand.* Our next governor must support the following additional measures

- Invest in **leak detection and repair.**
- Adopt programs that **price water to reward those who conserve, while paying the cost of service.**
- Require all buildings to be **retrofitted with water efficient appliances.**
- Adopt **aggressive energy conservation programs** – Saving energy saves water, not only today, but even more tomorrow as demand for new, thirsty power plants is reduced.

*Net water shortfall of 250 MGD (Water Contingency Task Force, 2009) minus 23.4 MGD (2010 Water Stewardship Act) leaves gap of 226.6 MGD; therefore, nearly 90% (or 199 MGD) of this gap can be achieved through aggressive conservation measures, see pg 6.

INTERBASIN TRANSFERS

It is vital that Georgia's leaders demonstrate RESPECT for communities throughout the state and their rights to enough clean water by controlling interbasin transfers through state legislation passed during the 2011 session.

Significant volumes of water are being piped between river basins, mostly in metro Atlanta, and current plans are to increase these volumes.

These largely unregulated transfers affect the quantity and quality of water in many of Georgia's streams. The communities downstream from the transfers, including those in Alabama and Florida, believe that they are adversely affected. These communities are aware of the economic and environmental costs of the transfers and are more politically active in their disapproval

Control of interbasin transfers is an essential component of any resolution of Georgia's water security problems.

How should we control interbasin transfers?

- (1) A moratorium on interbasin transfers should be put in place until a regulatory structure is achieved.
- (2) New interbasin transfers should be few, with very narrowly defined criteria for allowance, and highly protective of donor basins.
- (3) The new regulation should include a requirement to evaluate the restoration of flows to donor basins that have been impaired by existing transfers.

RIVERKEEPERS ON THEIR RIVERS

In Georgia, the Chattahoochee River is strained to the breaking point, and people in other river basins may be asked to sacrifice their own needs to supply metro Atlanta with water. Downstream communities on smaller river systems face increasing sewage and pollution loads as a result of this over-reliance on neighboring rivers. Coastal communities are being asked to give up their water and consider expensive and risky water schemes, like pumping chemically treated water into groundwater and filtering seawater.

Based on our decades of experience protecting Georgia's waterways, Georgia's Riverkeepers believe that our state and its neighbors can reach a mutually beneficial water-sharing agreement without sacrificing our communities or the rivers they depend upon.

The Altamaha – “In the Altamaha River system, we would see impacts everywhere from North and Middle Georgia to coastal marshlands if the flow of fresh water through the system were further reduced or degraded.” - *Deborah Sheppard, Altamaha Riverkeeper*

The Chattahoochee – “In the Chattahoochee River Basin we need to balance the needs of communities throughout our watershed and ensure that we all have enough clean water now and in the future. This means keeping enough water flowing in our river to dilute our waste water and maintain a healthy system for the people and wildlife that depend upon it.” – *Sally Bethea, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper*

The Coosa - “The Coosa River Basin is the most biologically diverse river basin in North America and communities throughout Northwest Georgia and Northeast Alabama depend upon adequate flows in the Etowah and Coosa rivers to sustain their way of life. If Metro Atlanta is allowed to transfer water without regulation from the Coosa Basin to enable continued and unending growth, the economic future and the ecological heritage of Coosa River communities will be forfeited.” – *Joe Cook, Coosa Riverkeeper/Coosa River Basin Initiative*

The Flint - The Flint River is a resource under assault. Our natural flows have been dramatically altered over the past 40 years. Reservoirs and interbasin transfers have lowered our flows during the dry months, affecting the quality of the water. Increased development in our headwaters has caused massive stormwater runoff, bringing in pollutants, silting our shoals, and endangering our drinking water supply. For the Flint to have enough clean water to fish in, to swim in, to drink . . . to support our economy and culture . . . the land in Metro North Georgia must be healed, and the water that falls on Metro North Georgia uses must be used much more fairly.” – *Gordon Rogers, Flint Riverkeeper*

The Oconee - “In the Oconee River basin in particular, proposed water-supply plans further stressing the streams of the upper basin would exacerbate water quality and quantity issues throughout the watershed.” - *Ben Emanuel, The Altamaha Riverkeeper's Oconee River Project Director*

The Ogeechee – “The Ogeechee is the longest free-flowing river on the eastern seaboard and a source of vital freshwater for Georgia's coast. Overuse and wetlands loss have lowered stream flows and reduced the river's ability to supply clean water for agriculture, seafood production, fishing and recreation. If more water is pulled out of neighboring systems to supply metro Atlanta, those systems will be less able to treat pollution, putting the Ogeechee at risk as the likely recipient of more sewage discharges.” – *Chandra Brown, Ogeechee Riverkeeper*

The Satilla - “The Satilla River Basin is largely made up of agriculture and forestry. At times we cannot even support the water needs at present. This Black Water River cannot support taking water from it in any form. The fresh water is vital for the sustainability of the basin from the headwaters to the coast.” - *Bill Miller, Satilla Riverkeeper*

The Savannah – “The Savannah River is the lifeblood of many communities located along her banks, including the 2nd and 4th biggest cities in GA. She is used heavily for industrial purposes, supplies drinking water to millions, and assimilates our waste as she flows downstream. We urge Atlanta to work towards a solution to their water shortage without taxing those of us who rely on our fresh water supply. The riverkeepers have come up with viable solutions and we encourage our next Governor to ensure a solution for Atlanta doesn't come at the expense of the rest of the state.” – *Tonya Bonitatibus, Savannah Riverkeeper*

HOW MUCH WATER CAN METRO ATLANTA SAVE?

The Georgia Water Stewardship Act passed by the 2010 General Assembly is the most comprehensive water efficiency and conservation legislation approved to date. It's a good start for Georgia and we applaud the state legislature for its passage, but we must do more.

We have analyzed the likely water savings from the law's provisions and concluded that it will not do enough to achieve the savings needed to sustain a prosperous and environmentally healthy Metro Atlanta region in the future—given the projected population growth and anticipated future droughts. In addition, because the law's implementation will achieve relatively small water savings, it is not likely to convince downstream communities that Metro Atlanta is doing *all* it can to promote water efficiency, an important consideration in ongoing "water war" discussions.

The **Water Stewardship Act contains four mandated measures (see below) that should save approximately 23.4 million gallons of water per day (MGD) in metro Atlanta by 2035.** These numbers were calculated using data included in the Perdue Water Contingency Task Force Report (12/21/09) and the water plans developed by the Metro North Georgia Water Planning District (5/09).

For comparison purposes, a savings of 23.4 MGD represents about 3.5% of the water demand in metro Atlanta during the 2000s and only 2.1% of the demand anticipated in 2035, based on figures prepared by the Metro Water Planning District.

Other cities in the United States have achieved much more significant water savings through conservation measures, including the following:

- **Boston:** decreased total water demand by 125 MGD or 33% in 29 years.
- **Seattle:** decreased total water demand by 40 MGD or 26% in 19 years.
- **NYC:** decreased total water demand by 70-90 MGD (toilet retrofits) in 3 years. This program saved the city more than \$200 million by deferring expansion of supply and wastewater infrastructure; from its peak in 1988 through 2003, NYC's per capita water use declined by 34% and its total water demand declined by 26%. (*American Rivers*)

<u>Water Stewardship Act Savings in Metro Atlanta:</u>	MGD
(1) Sub-metering for new multi-tenant construction* Individual unit meters required for new residential/commercial/industrial buildings after 7/2012	4.6
(2) High efficiency plumbing code change for new construction* High-efficiency toilets, showerheads, faucets and urinals required in new buildings after 7/2012	6.2
(3) Year-round, daytime outdoor watering restriction (10AM-4PM) Required after 1/2011 in accordance with local ordinances that must be approved	7.2
(4) High efficiency industrial cooling systems Required in all industrial building constructed after 7/2012	5.4
Total Savings (2035)	23.4 MGD

**Retrofits of fixtures in existing buildings would yield more savings, faster.*

ADDITIONAL MEASURES

We strongly encourage Georgia and metro Atlanta to undertake *additional* important measures—through mandatory requirements and incentives to promote voluntary actions—that can achieve the kind of water conservation other cities have attained and secure a prosperous future for the region.

<u>Metro Atlanta Estimated Water Savings</u>¹:	Low	High
<p>(1) Stop leaks in the water utility distribution pipes. In metro Atlanta 117 MGD are lost each day to leaks and unaccounted for uses. Fixing leaks saves water and helps a utility's bottom line by eliminating the need to treat and pump lost water that they are not paid for producing. The Water Stewardship Act requires a standard methodology for <i>measuring</i> leaks, but does not require any reductions.</p>	29	59
<p>(2) Price water to encourage efficient use. Water is not priced at its true value or cost. Conservation pricing provides a price signal to the customer to conserve, while providing a price structure that protects the utility's solvency in times of plentiful water and drought.</p>	54	79
<p>(3) Retrofit all buildings with water efficient fixtures. Outdated fixtures and appliances waste water. Retrofitting buildings through incentives such as rebates/tax holidays and through ordinances such as Retrofit on Reconnect generate proven, reliable and significant water savings. A 35% decrease in water use is possible through retrofits alone.</p>	36	55
<p>(4) Landscape to minimize waste. On average 30% of household drinking water is used to water lawns, trees, and shrubs and 50% of that water is wasted through over-watering and evaporation. Peaks in demand generated by outdoor water use drive the need to develop new water sources and expand costly water infrastructure. By reducing the peak demand, the life of infrastructure is extended and the need for new sources can be eliminated.</p>	Additional .8	Additional 6
Total Water Saved in MGD	119.8	199

¹ Based on Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District 2003 consumption numbers, 652 MGD. The low and high water saving figures were derived from the *Hidden Reservoir* report produced by American Rivers, 2008.

CONCLUSION

Georgia needs a change of course in resolving the Tri-State Water War and providing for metro Atlanta's water supply. The riverkeepers have issued this three-point plan as a call to action.

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Based on our decades of experience protecting Georgia's waterways, we believe that if our next governor and state leaders commit to our three Rs – RESPECT, REVEAL, REDUCE – then Georgia will be in a position reach agreement with our downstream neighbors and achieve a water sharing agreement by July 2012 to meet water needs not secured through conservation.

Georgia and its neighbors can reach a mutually beneficial water-sharing agreement without sacrificing our communities or the rivers they depend upon.

Charting a New Course for Georgia's Water Security is a joint product of Coosa River Basin Initiative, Flint Riverkeeper, and Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. It has been endorsed by all of Georgia's riverkeepers. Go to www.chattahoochee.org/tri-state-issues.php to find this content online. Contact Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (UCR) Communications Director Mary Harrison at (404) 352-9828 x24/mharrison@ucriverkeeper.org for more information.